



PROPERTY INSURANCE FAQ - 2026

Background

The churchwide organization and Office of the Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) offer many resources to help congregations and synods navigate the property and liability insurance landscape. That landscape is changing rapidly — congregations are experiencing sharp increases in premiums, loss of insurance coverage and denial of claims.

The Church Property Resource Hub, hearing concerns from many synod partners around church insurance, collaborated with the Office of the Secretary to create this FAQ document to serve as a reference for synod staff as they assist congregations in securing affordable and fair coverage for their church. Additional questions can be directed to Rob Thoma, director for risk management, and Tom Cunniff, general counsel.

Why is the insurance market so volatile right now?

The overall market has been difficult over the past few years, largely due to heavy property damage and an increase in filed claims resulting from natural disasters and extreme weather events. Other factors impacting the overall market include the general health of the U.S. economy and legal changes that have led to more, and higher, settlements in individual court cases. The insurance market is cyclical and has shown some signs of stabilization in late 2025.

Churches have also become increasingly expensive to cover due to years of deferred maintenance, the historic character of older buildings that are more expensive to repair, and broad trends of declining income. These factors also contribute to denied claims, premium increases and nonrenewal of policies.

Does the ELCA have a relationship with particular insurance providers?

The ELCA has had an exclusive endorsement agreement with Church Mutual since 2008. This arrangement provides funds for a dedicated position within the churchwide organization to advocate on behalf of congregations with Church Mutual.

The company has the capacity to underwrite the majority of churches within the ELCA and provides free resources for congregations to plan for potential claims and to assist in proactive loss mitigation. Due to this agreement with Church Mutual, the churchwide organization does not endorse other insurance providers but can provide a list of alternative insurers for congregations and synods to explore.

What assistance is available for congregations who are facing insurance challenges?

The director for risk management can advocate for congregations covered by Church Mutual who have had an insurance claim denied, a sharp premium increase year to year, or whose policy has not been renewed. Congregations in these situations should contact the director for risk management directly and quickly. The director can intercede with Church Mutual to attempt a resolution, which may include:

- Asking the congregation to address/fix risk exposures (e.g., roofing, electrical and other safety concerns and verifying compliance).
- Negotiating continued coverage with higher deductibles to help with cost issues and to provide a measure of coverage.
- Interceding in claims negotiations.
- Redirecting congregations to other denominational insurers that may consider providing insurance.

NOTE: These possible resolutions may or may not be feasible given a congregation's risk profile, market conditions and an alternate insurer's desire to offer insurance.

What resources are available for congregations who are not covered by Church Mutual and face insurance challenges?

These congregations will need to contact the local insurance broker or an independent insurance agent who wrote their insurance policy. These agents can help them address claims and other issues. If the congregation secured insurance directly from the insurer, they may also need to deal directly with the insurer or perhaps obtain appropriate legal counsel in complex/high-dollar-value cases.

What alternatives are there for congregations not renewed by Church Mutual?

In the event that Church Mutual will not renew an insurance policy, congregations can contact any of the following **denominational insurers**, bearing in mind that all insurers are subject to cyclical market trends and their own underwriting guidelines.

- [The Insurance Board](#)
- [Guide One](#)
- [Brotherhood Mutual Insurance](#)
- [Grinnell Mutual Insurance](#)
- [The Cincinnati Insurance Companies](#)

It is essential to contact these possible alternatives quickly, usually within three months of the renewal date, to allow time for underwriting, a possible site visit and any other insurer information requirements. **Congregations should avoid any period in which there is no insurance coverage.** At all times, but especially during periods of insurance lapse, it is essential that all congregational safety and security protocols are strictly enforced to minimize loss.

Does the ELCA have a broker who can help congregations compare alternative policies in the event they are not renewed by Church Mutual or if they are unsatisfied with the company's coverage?

No. Typically, in such circumstances, it is recommended that the congregation contact their local insurance broker or an independent insurance agent. These professionals do comparative analysis of various insurers' policies and can help congregations address claims and other issues. If a congregation secured insurance directly from the insurer, they may also need to deal directly with the insurer or obtain appropriate legal counsel in complex/high dollar value cases.

All these alternatives are still expensive. What about local or more general insurance providers?

The director for risk management **does not recommend** insurance policies with firms that do not specialize in church insurance. These providers often do not cover the breadth of property and liability terms that are essential for a congregation's protection and risk management. The comprehensive [Guidelines for Purchasing Insurance](#), which can be found in the [ELCA Resource Library](#), includes a list of recommended terms for coverage.

How risky would it be to go without property and/or liability insurance?

Without property and liability insurance, a congregation faces enormous risk. Any extreme weather event, natural disaster or other situation that results in major damage to the church building would be catastrophic to the church's finances and may result in loss of the facilities entirely. A lawsuit brought against the church could easily reach \$1 million in settlement, which would likely bankrupt a congregation.

Where can I find more information?

You can find more information about the endorsed Church Mutual program through the Office of the Secretary's dedicated webpage: [Risk Management, Loss Prevention, and Insurance](#). There, you can also find resources that help congregations proactively address liabilities that may result in lower premiums. All insurance information is available in the [ELCA Resource Library](#).

For congregations covered by Church Mutual, please reach out to Rob Thoma, director for risk management, with questions related to your current coverage — rob.thoma@elca.org. Congregations covered by other insurance providers should also reach out to Thoma for possible initial assistance.

The Church Property Resource Hub is committed to helping congregations faithfully steward their land and buildings. Please reach out to the Rev. Sarah Jones, program director, with general questions about property stewardship and preservation, and with general questions regarding property insurance — cprh@elca.org.